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VOLUME 22
JANUARY

WITH METROPOLITE DAMASKINOS AT CHAMBESY

THE "FOREVER" THAT ONE FORGETS

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Gen Rosso in North America

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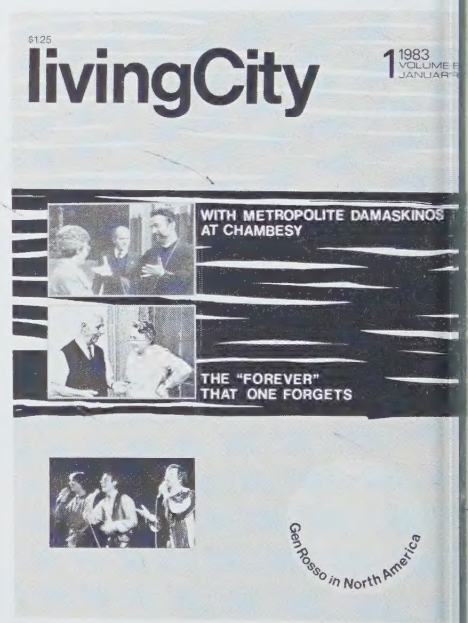

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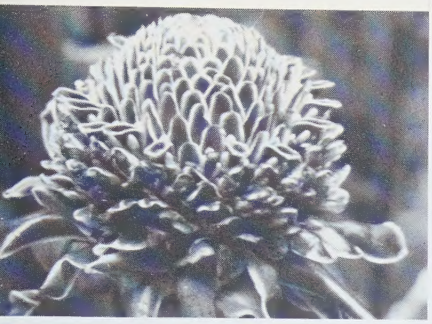
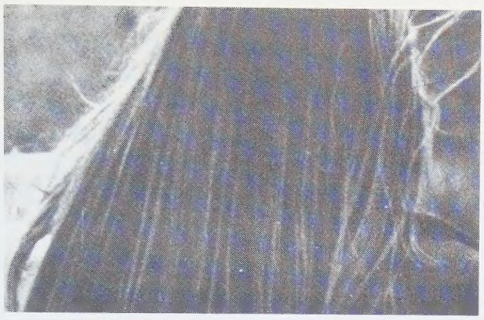


ORKING IN PERFECT COMMU-NION: A meditation by Chiara Lubich, oundress of the Focolare Movement.



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With Metropolite Damaskinos at Chambésy

by Henri-Louis Roche

During Chiara Lubich's visit to the Pan-Orthodox Center established by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Switzerland, the Metropolite explained the goals of this ecumenical initiative.

"A window of the Orthodox East opening onto the West, and that of the West opening onto the Orthodox East." This is how Metropolite Damaskinos of Tranoupolis (Turkey) likes to define the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Chambesy, near Geneva.

Its director since 1969, Damaskinos, aged forty-six, open-faced and cordial, is a leading personality in the work for unity which the different Christian Churches have been pursuing for many years. "The Center, which was created by Patriarch Athenagoras I, is unique in the world because of its Pan-Orthodox and ecumenical activities," explains Damaskinos. "It is a European extension of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and is designed primarily to serve the cause of Pan-Orthodox unity. It seeks to make unity more effective in the diversity existing among the several local Orthodox Churches. As you know, the Orthodox Church does not have a centralized structure, but is composed of fourteen Churches, called local Churches. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople presents a point of reference and has a certain authority over the whole of the Orthodox world.

"To be a local Church, means to be self-governing, and at the same time to live in community with the others. Unity in legitimate diversity is not divergent, it is consistent. The diversity of the liturgical language and of the local traditions, which are conditioned by the different socio-cultural and political backgrounds, does not represent a breach in the community of faith and love, but, on the contrary, an enrichment of its unity. As an example of this reality on the local plane, I can point to the four communities — the Greek, the Arab, the Rumanian and the French speaking one — which are housed in our Center."

ABOVE: Metropolite Damaskinos of Tranoupolis, Director of the Orthodox Center of Chambesy, Switzerland, since its opening in 1969.

BELOW: The Orthodox Center of Chambesy, established by Patriarch Athenagoras I.

Chiara Lubich and a few focolarini being welcomed by Metropolite Damaskinos on their visit to the Center in Chambesy.

"Chambesy is primarily a place of prayer and worship," says Georges Lemopulos, one of the twelve permanent members of the Center, a young lay theologian, who is secretary to Metropolite Damaskinos. The Center offers to some of the Orthodox communities in the area of Geneva the possibility of participating regularly in the liturgy: the Rumanians meet in their chapel, housed in the older building, the Greek and Arab community gather in the big, modern Church, the French speaking Orthodox, mostly young people who speak the language of their native country, worship in a crypt reserved for their services.

However the reason why the Ecumenical Patriarchate wanted to create this outpost of Orthodoxy so close to the headquarters of large international organizations, and particularly the Ecumenical Council of Churches, is that the very function of Chambesy is mainly ecumenical. Even the financing of the Center has been ecumenical from the very beginning: the money, in fact, comes not only from the Orthodox, but also from the Lutherans, the German Catholics, and the Catholic Bishops Conference of Switzerland.

"The Center's main ecumenical mission," explains Metropolite Damaskinos, "consists in trying to heal the separation between East and West because, according to our doctrine on the Church, a divided Christianity is an open wound in the Body of Christ. We must overcome the barriers that separate us. The Center coordinates the dialogues of the Orthodox Churches with Christians of other Churches and traditions. There are other activities carried out here which should serve an ecumenical purpose. For instance, there is the publication of various periodicals: *Episkepsis*, a Greek and French bimonthly magazine of information, and *Synodica*, a theological magazine, to name only two. A sizeable library and other services are also available to all Orthodox and non-Orthodox Churches.

"In collaboration with the Department of Protestant Theology of the University of Geneva and other Swiss universities, the Center also organizes yearly 'seminars' on a graduate level. Since 1980, these seminars have become a very important activity. Professors and

At the end of their visit to the Orthodox Center, Chiara Lubich and the focolarini are given a warm farewell by Metropolite Damaskinos.

Chiara Lubich at the Orthodox Center

The warm and rewarding relationship which Chiara Lubich and the Focolare Movement have maintained with the Orthodox world goes back many, many years. A very beautiful rapport with Patriarch Athenagoras I has been followed by a close relationship with his present successor, Dimitrios I.

This is how Metropolite Damaskinos describes this bond: "I feel a spiritual affinity with the Focolare Movement and with its foundress and animator. This Movement incarnates in an exemplary way the central message of the Gospel: to live in deep communion with God and with our neighbor, in mutual love, in prayer, in a life based on the hypostatic truth of Christianity (Christ – true God and true man). This truth identifies itself with God Incarnate, God-Man, the crucified and the risen Christ, always present among us by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

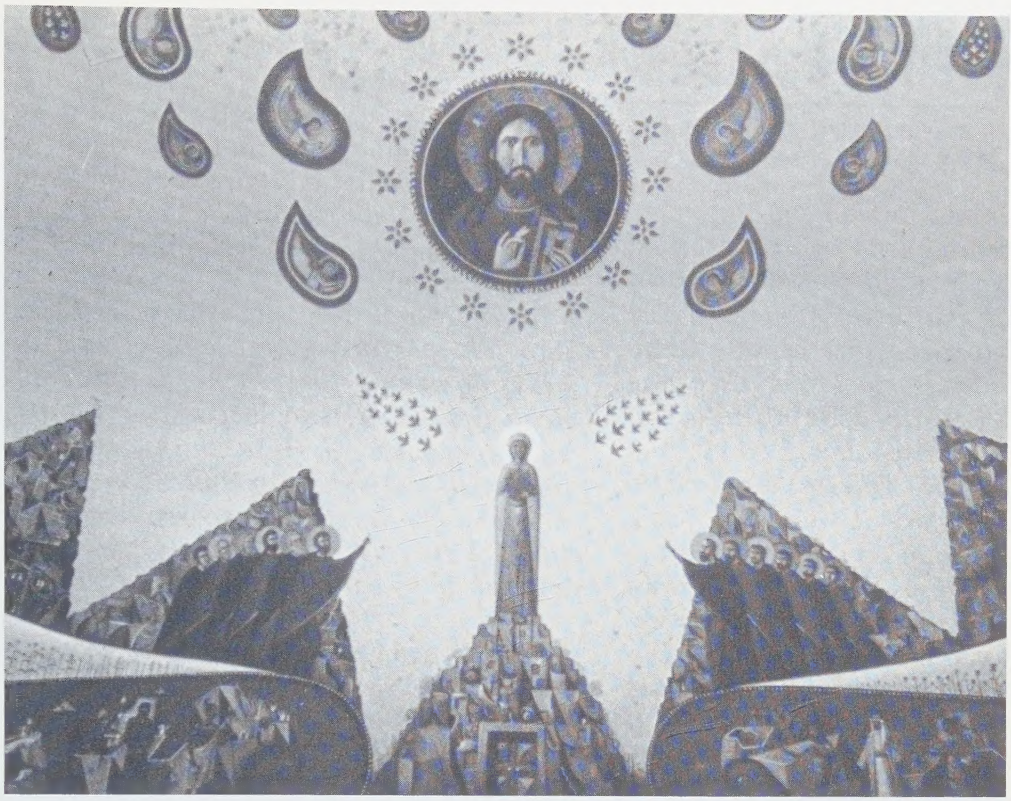
"I remember with joy our meeting, on May 5, 1981, at the Mariapolis Center of Rocca di Papa. It was a meeting that gave me the opportunity to speak about 'The Will of God Today' and to have wider contact with the Movement. I am now rejoicing over Chiara's visit to our Center which marks a new step in our relationship."

During her visit Chiara Lubich spoke to the Greek Orthodox parish of Chambesy on Sunday, September 19, 1982, at the conclusion of the liturgy. Her talk centered on the presence of Jesus in the midst of Christians united in his name, and on its ecumenical implications.

After the talk Chiara and the "focolarini" who accompanied her were invited to receive the blessed bread with the Orthodox community. Afterwards, Metropolite Damaskinos took Chiara and her party on a tour of the Chambesy Center and presented her with a gift from Patriarch Dimitrios I of Constantinople.

theologians of different Churches and traditions, are provided with an opportunity to study current ecumenical themes together and to explore them in depth. The theme of the first seminary, held from May through June of 1980, was 'Local Church and Universal Church.' The Second, held from April through July of 1981, dealt with 'The Meaning and Relevance of the Second Ecumenical Council for the Christian World of Today,' and the most recent one of 1982, held in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther, was devoted to 'Luther and the German Reformation in an Ecumenical Perspective.' "

This intense theological-ecumenical work moves along the guidelines set down for Chambesy in 1975 by the present Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, namely, "It should be like a theological reser-



The ceiling of the Center's modern chapel is painted in the Oriental iconic style.

voir working in an ecumenical perspective for the formation of people coming from all local Orthodox Churches." Aiming at an exchange between Western and Eastern theologians (the Center) should specialize in inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian dialogues, so that such an exchange may best reflect the deep desire of God's people to see the Body of Christ built up in view of unity of faith."

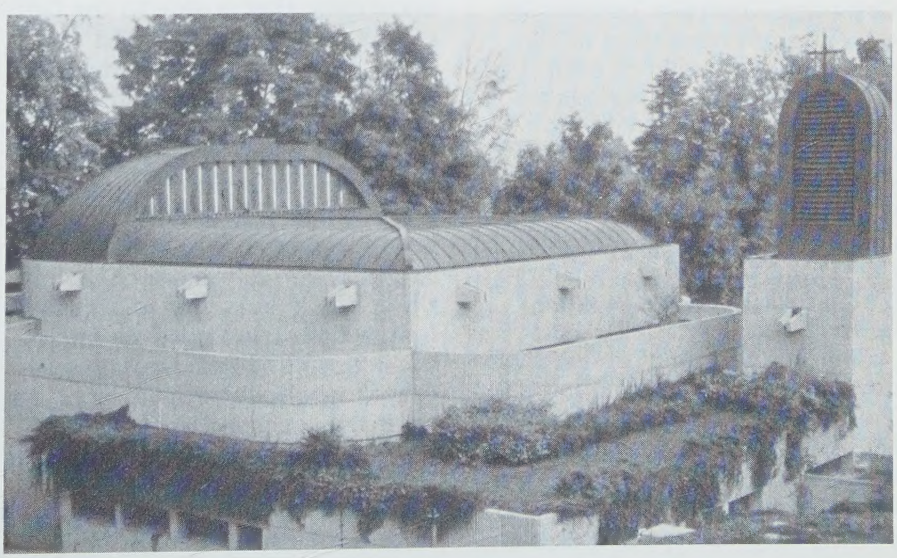
It is no wonder, therefore, that all those who work for Christian unity in the world always receive a warm welcome at Chambesy, as did Chiara Lubich, foundress of the Focolare Movement, when she was invited to speak to the Orthodox community on September 19, 1982.

Therefore, unity among different Christian denominations and unity within the Orthodox world are the two closely related goals of the Chambesy Center. The first, if it is to be effective, does, in fact, presuppose the second, a conviction that is keenly felt by the Orthodox, because their very structure is conciliar in nature. To them the Council, the synod of Bishops, successors to the apostles, is indeed the supreme authority. However, only the first seven great Councils of the Church, those held before the schism between East and West, are being recognized as true ecumenical Councils. Whatever has been established later in the Roman Catholic Church, and particularly in regard to the juridical primacy and to the infallibility of the Pope, has never been ratified by them in council, even though they do acknowledge a certain primacy to the Bishop of Rome.

On the other hand, after the Council of Nicea of 787, the last great Council of the undivided Church, the Orthodox never met all together in a Pan-Orthodox council. This was due above all to the long domination of the Turkish Empire. For twelve centuries, the Orthodox Churches were never able to meet in order to examine their faith in the context of the modern world. Hence, their greatest desire today is to have a great Pan-Orthodox Council.

As Metropolite Damaskinos informs us, "The Orthodox Center at Chambesy, seat of the Secretariat for the preparation of the 'holy

The Center's main church with its extremely modern lines, where the foundress of the Focolare Movement gave her talk on unity.



Photos by Mario Ponta

The symbol at the entrance of the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Chambesy, where preparations for the next Pan-Orthodox council are in progress.

and great Council of the Orthodox Church,' was the scene of a very important conference, held from the third to the twelfth of September. It was the second preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (part of a series of conferences of the entire Orthodox world) set up for the purpose of preparing the Council. It was a great event inasmuch as it was the first time that the Orthodox Churches met together after many centuries of isolation, one from another. Such isolation can be explained, first of all, by the non-centralized structure of the Orthodox Churches, but also by the extreme complexity of the socio-political origin of each. Unfortunately, and for various reasons, we have been unable to achieve the perfect communion which expresses our profound identity. It is in view of this goal, namely, to live this communion to the fullest, that we are now preparing for the 'holy and great Council'."

The first preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference was held in 1976. This second one, just recently concluded at Chambesy, was attended by delegates from all local Churches in the world. Over 600 participants, bishops and theologians, discussed specific topics including impediments to marriage, the revision of ecclesiastical rules on fasting, and the common celebration of Easter.

The implications of marriages between faithful of the Orthodox Church and Christians of other confessions, as well as between the Orthodox and non-Christians, were also discussed, stated Metropolite Damaskinos. "As for Easter, you know that Christians of the Eastern Church and those of the Western Church do not celebrate it on the same day. This is due to astronomical data, that is, due to the fact that the spring equinox and the full moon are calculated in a different way in the East and the West. Now, according to new tabulations set down by astronomers, the Orthodox of the East and the West will be able to celebrate Easter on the same day, the first Sunday after the full moon following the spring equinox, as established by the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. In order to prevent too much controversy, we have preferred not to change the way of calculating the date for Easter, for the moment. We feel that it is indispensable, to first inform the faithful.

"During the Conference we also assigned the various tasks to the preparatory Commission to the Council and decided on the four themes of the next preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conferences: 1) reexamination of the ecclesiastical precepts on fasting; 2) relationship of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world — that is, an examination of our bilateral theological dialogues with the other Christian Churches and confessions, i.e., with the Roman Catholic Church, the Old Catholic Church, the ancient Oriental Churches, the Anglican Church and the Lutherans; 3) Orthodoxy and the ecumenical movement of the Churches and the evaluation of our contribution to the multilateral dialogues; 4) the contribution of the local Orthodox Churches to the triumph of the Christian ideals of peace, liberty, and fraternity among peoples, and to the abolishment of racism.

"In brief," concluded the Metropolite, "we hope that the examination of all these issues will strengthen our Pan-Orthodox communion, which is indispensable for an efficient opening of Orthodoxy toward the other Christian Churches and confessions."

Gen Rosso

compiled by Rosemary Moran

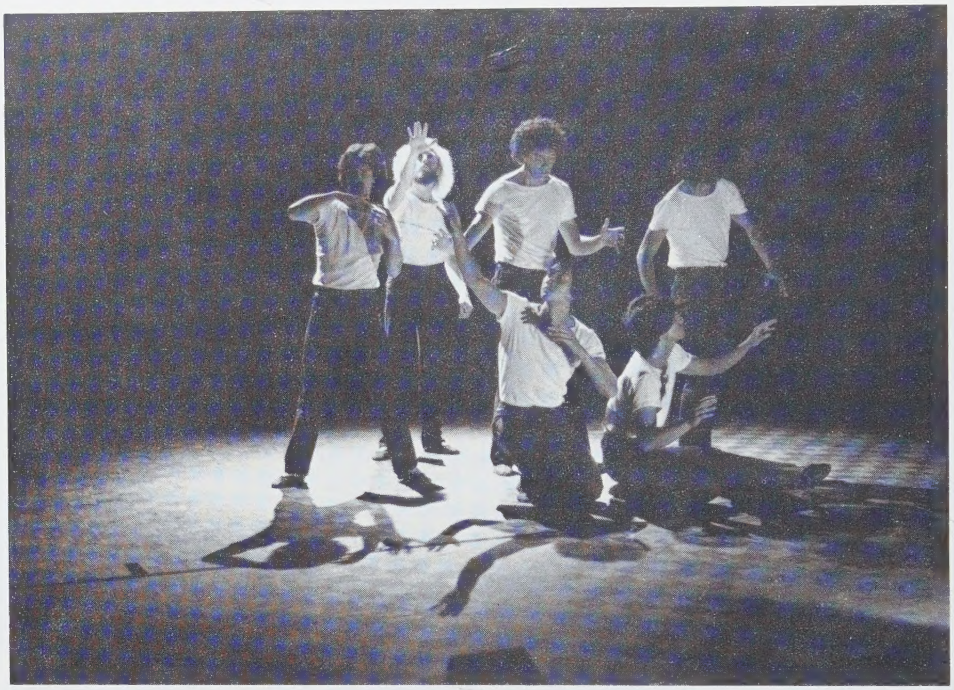
In the fall of 1982, Gen Rosso — an international musical ensemble of the Focolare Movement — travelled across the United States and Canada on its first North American tour. During the months of September and October its members performed in 10 cities, receiving very good reviews from the press and public alike. We interviewed Claude Blanc, a representative of New City Press, who accompanied the group on its tour, in order to obtain a first-hand account of the events of those days.

Question: We would like to ask you a few questions. Since you travelled with the members of Gen Rosso in their journey across North America, why don't you start off by telling us the itinerary of the tour?

Answer: It was the latter part of August when the 21 members of Gen Rosso arrived in New York. They spent barely enough time here to adjust to the time difference between Italy and the U.S.A. before they took off again for San Antonio, Texas, the city which became our base of operation for the tour of the Southwest.

Gen Rosso's trip to North America, in fact, had been initiated by Duncan Whitney, the CYO Director of the San Antonio diocese. After hearing about the group a year and a half ago through members of the Focolare Movement, he had become very enthused about the possibility of their coming to the United States. With this goal in mind, he managed to convince quite a few others who are also involved in youth ministry in the Southwest to co-sponsor the group's eventual tour.

When we arrived in San Antonio, there was a brief press



A moment during Gen Rosso's performance of "Someone lets the sun rise."

conference right at the airport. It was Gen Rosso's first contact with the American public at large, and we saw it as a great opportunity to launch the tour. We were aware from the outset that we would have to do a lot of public relations work in each city where the group was scheduled to perform, because unlike in Europe where the group is by now famous, in America the group was completely unknown, except to members and friends of the Focolare Movement.

The tour took us from San Antonio to Tucson, Arizona, with a brief stopover in El Paso both going and returning. After the Tucson concerts, Gen Rosso performed in Waco, Victoria, San Antonio and Austin in Texas; Lafayette in Indiana; Aurora and Chicago in Illinois; Toronto, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec.

Although it seemed that just a short time had passed, it was already a month and a half later when we returned to New York. Again the stay here was short: just the time to sing for a Mass in Rockville Center in Long Island, to greet the many friends they had made, to pack and leave.

Question: You yourself were part of Gen Rosso for three years some time back. What was your impression upon seeing them now?

Answer: To tell you the truth at the beginning of the tour we had so many things to do that I didn't even consider what the audience reaction might be to Gen Rosso's performances. Their first concert was to be held in Tucson, Arizona, as I mentioned before. We had a lot of P.R. work to do to prepare for it. We went to sing everywhere we were welcome — in squares, on campuses, on street corners . . . I recall well the day we spent at the University of Arizona. We were situated in a huge open square through which many students passed, especially at lunchtime. It was a rather new experience for Gen Rosso, because its members usually perform before captive audiences. There at the University they were out in the open, singing their hearts out really, and just hoping that people would come over to listen. All in all, it was a beautiful experience, because it certainly gave us an opportunity to meet many, many people whom we might not have reached otherwise.

Then, before we knew it, the night of the first concert had arrived. I have to say, in all sincerity, that the performance flabbergasted me, and I'll tell you why: I thought I knew Gen Rosso and knew what they could do. I had recently even seen a movie of their show. But that night I was truly overwhelmed, also by the professional quality of their act. Everything came together in a way that brought their message of unity across with real power. When the show was over, the people were beside themselves with joy.

In the foreground, Mario Falcon, from the island country of Malta.

Question: We have heard it mentioned that the Canadian part of the tour was particularly successful. Would you tell us something about it?

Answer: We left Chicago where the group performed before 2,000 people on October 10, to go to Canada where six concerts had been planned, four in Toronto and two in Montreal. In Toronto everything had been organized in a first-rate manner. The Focolare Centers had cooperated with Churches, schools, groups, and so on and everything had been so well coordinated that when we arrived the tickets were already almost sold out. We performed to a full house on each of the four nights, and in all, about 4,800 people saw Gen Rosso perform.

The concerts in Montreal were unlike those in any of the other cities because there everything had to be done in French. Consequently, from the moment we arrived in the city the members of Gen Rosso spent every spare minute rehearsing their French texts. The Montreal theater had 2,200 seats, and it was filled to capacity on both nights. We could see how very hard the Focolare community there had worked to publicize the event. Those shows were really fantastic. The audience reaction was sensational and even the media really took notice of what was going on. Several show biz programs announced the concerts, we were interviewed on the radio, and the Gen Rosso record was reviewed on the air, too. In every sense, the preparation had been done very, very well.

Question: Would you share with us your overall impression of the tour?

Answer: When I was in San Antonio, a team from Eyewitness News came to one of the concerts to tape part of the show for that evening's broadcast. They met me outside the theater, and the reporter asked me on camera, "Why do you think people should come to see Gen Rosso?" "To experience the sense of hope that their music conveys," I told him. "To feel the joy of living."

I think that this comment sums up well just what the tour was really all about. The performance gave everyone who saw it a genuine sense of hope. The joy of living that these young men bring with them was transmitted to the audience, and as a consequence, they were deeply touched.

In short, it was a very successful tour, and a truly beautiful one as well. In the course of those two months we met many people, 40,000, more or less. I'm certain that the seed of unity that was sown in so many hearts will bear much fruit in the years to come.

"Gen Rosso - an upbeat musical United Nations" [San Antonio Express

After the performance many people left their impressions . . .

"I felt God's love enveloping me, giving me also the courage to start again."

"Your message of God's love came through loud and clear! We loved the concert — full of joy and hope for unity among God's people all over the world."

"A very impressive and refreshing event. May you continue to bring hope and love to the world through the creative use of your God-given talents."

"You brought me closer to God tonight."

"Excellent performance. You make this world a better place to live."

"Your talent is tremendous but the depth of your message, the simple yet profound spirituality of the Focolare Movement shines through — 'that all may be one'."

"I do not practice any religion in particular but seeing all this faith on stage, all these young people so full of life and rich in talent, I'm beginning to believe that there must be Someone truly powerful and truly good to have created such a force."

"You have given me refreshment and a renewed hope in the face of many crumbling illusions."

"Truly, today I saw God's word in practice."

"This show came at a very important time in my life, I was feeling lost and alone, I now remembered that God is with me always."

"My impressions were that when I came I felt tied down, and now I am set free with the love of God."

"I also know that if you ever played in front of the leaders of all the countries, the world would not know the meaning of war and hatred."

Who are the members of Gen Rosso?

Within the Focolare Movement, the spirituality of unity finds expression in a variety of ways. Two of these forms — Gen Verde and Gen Rosso — are artistic ones in the field of music. Our readers are already familiar with the story of Gen Verde, the young women who performed in New York and Chicago just over a year ago in commemoration of the Focolare Movement's 20th Anniversary in North America. Now we would like them to become acquainted with the story and experience of the Gen Rosso.

On December 23, 1966, in the small international city of Loppiano located near Florence, Italy, a group of young men with varied musical experience and talents came together to form the first Gen Rosso band. On that chilly winter's day, few of the citizens of Loppiano suspected that they were witnessing a musical phenomenon in the making. But 16 years, twenty albums, and hundreds of performances later, this fact can hardly be disputed.

Viewed against the background of other contemporary music, Gen Rosso really seems to constitute a rather special case. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to classify their unique blend of music, dance and drama. What sets them apart from other popular groups is the members' express commitment to vocalize and dramatize experiences that they have *lived* in their own lives, those arising from the particular way of life that they have chosen. They are committed to living for unity and for the solidarity of all people, based on the Gospel message of love.

If Gen Rosso has a special strength, it lies in this inseparable link between what they sing about and what they live. Their music has the power to move people because it contains a message that is based on life.

At the conclusion of Gen Rosso's North American tour, we interviewed four of its members, asking about the group's history and development, its day-to-day life, and its experience in America.

Interview with Beni Enderle

Question: Would you describe for us the development of Gen Rosso in the sixteen years since it came into existence in 1966?

Answer: Gen Rosso has always had one purpose, one motivation, one way of working and composing. It has been like this from the beginning and it will never change. Our purpose, the goal that we want to pursue, the reality we want to express, is precisely this, unity. To accomplish this there is a need for people who have given their lives for unity. People who are solely dedicated to artistic expression, for instance, would not suffice, because what we want to convey to people is precisely the unity among us, Jesus in our midst.

In this sense, Gen Rosso has not changed at all in the past sixteen years. What has changed are the means through which we express this unity among us. We've always tried to make our music reflect the times. It's widely known that in the last ten or twelve years the music that is popular among young people, rock music, has gone through many changes, both qualitative and technical. The means of musical expression are always being perfected and in addition this music is reaching an always greater number of people. We have seen the phenomenon of concerts for ten thousand, then twenty thousand, then one hundred thousand young people. These have been true manifestations of the spirit motivitating

Beni Enderle, singer, composer and keyboard artist.

young people, of their needs, all expressed through the language of music. In the past sixteen years Gen Rosso has tried to recognize what these needs are and to adapt our music and our performances accordingly. We hope that our music will answer some of these needs.

In order to do this we have had to improve technically. Gen Rosso started out with just one amplifier and a few guitars. Now we have to be ready to give concerts for ten or twelve thousand people.

At first we had one guitarist, one organist, one drummer. Now we are many more. There are three of us on the keyboard, we have a drummer, a percussionist, several guitarists and so on. We have also seen the need to deepen our knowledge of music. Therefore some of us studied musical arrangement. We learned to use a synthesizer which we consider one of the most important instruments of our times. Then, our concerts themselves have changed. We started out with a simple list of songs. When someone came to visit us or when some event was taking place we would sing these songs expressing Gospel themes. We did the songs in a certain order. First one, then another, then another, and we explained the meaning behind them: this song expresses such and such.

Then, little by little, we understood that our music had to have a unifying theme. Through the rock opera which we have been performing on this tour "Someone Lets The Sun Rise," we want to express the story of our lives. We feel that it is more complete than some of our earlier shows because it includes mime and dance as well as music. Our show is a form of opera using rock music, and so, like opera, it contains some dialogue.

The thread which ties everything together is our own story. This is not a story which we have made up but rather the one we have lived and are living. It goes like this: Before joining Gen Rosso some of us had lived in countries where there were many social problems, those divisions among people which can be found in Europe, Asia, America, all over the world. We had experienced great frustration when we surveyed the state of the world, and meanwhile, within our hearts, there was a deep desire for unity. However this desire was coupled with bitter struggles, with desperation. This is the state of humanity when our lives have not been renewed by love, when men have not established relationships with one another.

The first act of our rock opera expresses this aspect of society. It highlights our many differences, racial, social and so forth. It exposes the hatred which often exists among people and which culminates in social conflict. We have tried to show this through a modern dance in which two groups portray the struggle of man against man. They show competition, desperation and the destruction of first one and then the other because neither of them has found an answer to their needs.

Then we sing that God has given us this answer, creating a sun which shines on everyone. In fact, "Someone Lets The Sun Rise" is the title of our show. We go on to say that each person has a unique value and that if you want to discover it you must love him or her, just as Jesus has told us.

Then in the second act we relate various experiences which we've had in living this evangelical life. Each one is expressed through song, and there are songs in English, Spanish and Italian. All in all, we want to show that what matters in life is to give our lives for one another and for our Ideal, which is God. Once again, it is Jesus who has shown us how to do this, and therefore the conclusion of our show expresses this reality: Jesus has given his life for all.

Interview with Nino Mancuso, a composer and keyboard artist who has been with the group since its inception.

Question: Most of the musical groups which are in vogue today appeal to people of just one age group or another. Gen Rosso, on the other hand, has a following that includes people of all ages. And whereas many of the songs that are so popular today will undoubtedly be considered outdated five years from now, your music has a timeless quality. To what do you attribute this?

Answer: We try to extract from everything that we see and hear today that which is genuinely beautiful and essential, because not all that we see and hear is truly art. There is always a danger of mistaking what is merely fashionable for what is actually art. So who can say what is and isn't? Me or you? No. Only Jesus can do this.

"But is it possible to have Jesus among us?" you may ask. Certainly it is possible. If we live mutual love, he will be in our midst as he

promised and, then, when we listen to a piece of music, we will have the light to evaluate it and render a judgment which is objective, or at least relatively objective. It will be more objective than if Beni, who comes from another age group, were to give it.

We want to create things that are simple, beautiful and modern. To be truly modern means to bear the imprint of beauty. In order for us to recognize this beauty we must continually keep Jesus in our midst.

Question: Thus far, we've spoken primarily about your life in the public eye. You say in your songs that everything you do is based on unity. How do you carry this out "behind the scenes?"

Answer: Our daily life is composed of ordinary, run-of-the-mill things. We don't just make music. We also iron shirts, cook our meals, do the dishes and so forth. In other words, our life is like that of a family, because where there is true harmony among people there is also true family life.

Logically, when we are on tour we spend most of our time in the theater, preparing the performances. However, we try to live for unity throughout the whole day, doing each little thing with the knowledge that everything we do — listening, helping out, welcoming the audiences — will be reflected in our performance onstage.

Many times, when we speak with the public, we are told, "You are so spontaneous!" And yet most of us have had little or no experience as performers. We only gain experience little by little, after being with the group for a while. Likewise, we are told, "You are born entertainers!" I must say that, in reality, this impression is not due to the fact that we are talented, but to the fact that we are Christians. Because if we are used to going before each person knowing that we are before Jesus, if we are used to loving each person as Jesus should be loved, then when we go on stage it is only natural for us to treat the public in the same way, to try to give them our all. In other words, this is a way of life we're talking about, not just public relations.

I recall a concert which we gave one night in Tokyo. 4,000 people were present there. As you may know, in Japan Catholics make up only 3% of the population. Among those 4,000 people there were only a few hundred Christians, however, we gave our concert just as we always do, knowing that what we want to show the public is not just a philosophy, but a way of life.

While we were in Tokyo that time, we met a Japanese Buddhist choreographer who came up to us after one show to say how much she admired our style of dancing. She told us, "What has impressed me the most is how you all think about the same thing while you're dancing. I work with a group of forty dancers, and it's difficult to get them to perform a step *together*, to get them to set their minds on the same thing when they dance together. Yet, I can see that your group does this."

At that point, the priest who was translating for us told her, "You know, all of them are Christians. Perhaps that has something to do with the way they dance." She thought his remark over for a minute and said, "Now I understand. You dance like this because as Christians you have gone beyond art. You are more than just artists."

Interview with Luis Bellido

Question: We have spoken about your music, about how it is conceived and arranged. Luis, would you share with us your experience as a dancer in Gen Rosso?

Answer: Marcy Bautista is the one who usually does our choreography. When he creates a certain choreography and we try to perform it, it often happens that one of us is not able to execute a certain movement. Perhaps he is physically unable to move in a certain way . . . In that case, we all stop what we're doing and try to see together how we can modify the step which is giving him the difficulty. Then, it usually turns out that we don't perform the choreography exactly as it was originally conceived. However, oftentimes it becomes even more beautiful. We may have sacrificed a step that was too difficult, a step that perhaps seven of us could do and the eighth could not, but instead we substitute another

Luis Bellido, singer and dancer

which turns out to be even better than the first. This happens to us every day, and it proves that mutual love is truly the solution to every difficult situation.

Interview with Valerio Cipri

Question: Valerio, what has been your experience in your time with Gen Rosso?

Answer: There would be so very much to say. Let me tell you just this — there have been certain periods in the history of Gen Rosso which resembled the springtime. They were times of growth and abundant fruits. Other periods resembled autumn — perhaps there were no inspirations, no new songs... Or maybe the songs existed, but there wasn't the right person to sing them. One person can't do all the singing... In moments like that, one has to have a lot of patience and great trust in God. We have to go ahead believing that whatever happens to us happens for our good.

I'll give you a small example. Just the other week, when we were in Toronto, two of us were injured in a car accident. After taking care of those who were hurt, I couldn't help thinking of the performance which was about to take place. The lead guitarist and our principal dancer had been injured. I didn't know what we would do, but all of us believed that since God had permitted this to happen he would also provide us with a solution. There wasn't a moment of discouragement. We changed what we could and went ahead with the performance, and it bore many fruits.

We have often encountered similar situations and they have taught us never to lose heart. The only things we have to be concerned about are that we prepare ourselves well, professionally, for each performance, and that there is always Jesus in our midst. If this is the case, then everything else works out.

We are now preparing to leave this country and you may wonder what we have in our hearts at the end of our stay. As you probably know, although Gen Rosso had travelled throughout both Europe and Asia, this was our first North American tour. When we arrived in New York we weren't at all sure of what to expect. We couldn't help wondering if in America, where musical groups are a dime a dozen, we would truly be able to share our ideal of unity effectively through music and dance. In fact, we soon discovered that we couldn't count on publicity alone, or on advance planning, or anything else, to attract an audience for our performances. We simply had to be what we were supposed to be. Only then, having first established mutual love and unity among us, would we be able to have any success.

When we were staying in San Antonio, we saw a poster with a saying of Chiara Lubich which reads, "No one should pass our way in vain." We took that phrase as our motto, committing ourselves to being ready to give our lives for each person that we would meet while on tour here. And having done so, we saw the American people as they really are. It seemed to us that they possess true simplicity. They are open, sincere and ready for unity. We've discovered a truly wonderful world here and I can say in all sincerity that even when we leave America our hearts will remain, because we would truly like to stay among these people.

Question: What can we expect from Gen Rosso in the future?

Valerio Cipri, the group's director who also sings and composes.

Answer: From a musical point of view, we already have another show ready which is different from "Someone lets the sun rise" which we performed on this tour. The music, the choreography and the dialogue are all prepared. We have only to execute them. We hope that this new show will be a sure step ahead.

Our future is always in the hands of God, of course. Almost every year some people leave the group and others join in. Because of this it is difficult, professionally speaking, to deliver performances at the same level from year to year. It is a constant challenge which helps us to remain rooted in God always, because what is *essential* to our performance is its spiritual foundation. We've seen that the more mutual love grows among us, the more each person's talents and inspirations come into relief. So, above all else, we will strive toward becoming perfect in mutual love.

The stories of the members of Gen Rosso are all interesting. We have chosen to publish the story of Nino Mancuso in this issue and the story of Luis Bellido in the next issue.

As a child, growing up in Sicily, I studied music, primarily because my father wanted me to. He himself was a violinist who had never been able to fulfill his own musical ambitions. He taught me to play both the accordion and the guitar. When I look back on it now, I'm sure that he did so, in part, because he saw that I had a certain musical ability; but it also seems likely that he wanted to see his own aspirations fulfilled in me.

I went on studying music for many years, making it, in effect, the ideal of my life. But deep down I wasn't happy and I didn't know why. At a certain point I began to ask myself what I was living for. On the one hand, it seemed that I had everything one could ever want: a girlfriend, a close-knit family. . . . Professionally, things were going very well for me. I had finished my studies at the Conservatory of Music in Palermo, having majored in Composition and Conducting. While still quite young, I had also performed as a concert artist. So in one sense, it could be said that I was a person who had reached a certain position in life.

But in spite of this, I wasn't happy. One day, when I was about twenty six years old, I read the story of St. Augustine. I was struck by his words, "Lord, our hearts are restless until they rest in you." I understood then that God was the only Ideal which could truly satisfy me. I wanted to give him the first place in my life, but I didn't know exactly how to do it. I was sure of one thing, however. I understood that I could no longer make either music, or my family, or my hobbies, the ideal of my life. It was clear that none of those things could satisfy my heart.

I decided then that it would be good to dedicate myself to teaching music, because God had made me see that the gift of music he had given me, was intended not for me, but for the others. I understood that it was a gift from God that I had to put at the service of humanity. And still I found myself wondering just what God wanted me to do with my life. I felt that I hadn't yet found my place in society, and it was at this time that I met a nun who told me about the Focolare Movement. Following her advice, I went to a Mariapolis[1] and there I learned about this spirituality of unity.

For me, that encounter with the Movement was an encounter with Jesus himself. I realized that the atmosphere which surrounded me, the joy and light in the eyes of the people I met, was a fruit of the presence of Jesus, and all of this fascinated me. I felt that these were the people whom I had always dreamed of meeting, the family I had always dreamed of having. When the Mariapolis was over, I visited the Focolare Center often. Then, after about a year, I asked if I could go to Loppiano[2] because I felt that this was the place to which God was calling me.

It was 1965, and there at Loppiano I understood that God had a plan for my life. I couldn't see it in all its entirety. However, I knew that I had only to trust in God and follow Jesus, putting his words into practice.

Upon arrival at Loppiano I put aside my musical talents because at that time the city was just being built and there were roads to build and buildings to construct. I performed various jobs, working first as a laborer and then as

Gen Rosso on tour in San Antonio, Texas.

a construction worker. After a while, I worked as a cook, then in the laundry. In other words, I had the opportunity to try my hand at everything but music.

There came a time, however when people began to visit Loppiano. They usually came on Sundays, and in order to entertain them I would sometimes play the accordion while a few young men sang. One of these men was Brazilian, another Argentine, and so they sang South American folk songs and I accompanied them on the accordion. This was only on Sundays though, because during the week we had to work at building the city.

During the summer of 1966, Chiara Lubich[3] traveled to Germany for an ecumenical meeting which was attended by Catholics and Lutherans. There she heard a band composed of four young Lutheran boys. One of them played the drums, another the guitar, another the bass guitar, and they all sang. They were people truly committed to living the Gospel and they sang aloud their life. Their music made a great impression on all who heard them, but, above all, on the young people. It seemed to Chiara then that music is like the "language" of the youth.

After that meeting, Chiara came to Loppiano and told us what had taken place in Germany. She also mentioned how she had understood there that music can be a very effective way of spreading our spirituality, especially among young people. She encouraged us to take advantage of this means of communicating the Gospel message.

In December of that same year she gave us a set of red drums. (The word "rosso" means "red," and this is how Gen Rosso got its name.) I was there when those drums arrived, and in the beginning of January, Mario De Siati, Valerio Cipri and Gioi Provenzano came to Loppiano as well. Together with some others who are no longer part of the group, we formed the first Gen Rosso band. We usually worked at writing and arranging our music in the evenings, because during the day we were still busy with other jobs.

In the spring of 1968 we cut our first record. It was a 45 rpm, with the song "Maria" on one side and "Gen, Gen, Gen" on the other. Soon after it came out we cut a second record, and then a third. We began to tour then, first throughout Europe, then in Asia, and now . . . in North America.

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1) Summer gathering of the Focolare Movement.
2) A small city built by the Focolare Movement near Florence, Italy.
3) Foundress of the Focolare Movement.

Working in perfect communion

It is very wise to spend the time we have by living perfectly the will of God in the present moment.

Sometimes, however, we are assailed by such worrying thoughts, whether they regard the past, the future or the present, concerning places or circumstances or people we cannot directly dedicate ourselves to, that it takes the greatest effort to steer the ship of our life, keeping to the course God wishes of us in *that* present moment.

Then, to live perfectly, we need a will, a decision, but above all, a *confidence* in God that can reach an heroic degree.

'I can do nothing in this case for that dear person who is sick or in danger, for that complicated situation . . .'

'Well then, I will do what God wants of me in this moment: study well, sweep well, pray well, take care of my children well . . .'

'And God will see to the untangling of this knot, comforting the one who is suffering, sorting out that unexpected event.

It is a job done by two people in perfect communion, that demands from us great faith in God's love for his children and that makes it possible, through our action, for God himself to have trust in us.

This reciprocal confidence works miracles.

We will see that what we could not do, an Other has truly done, and has done far better than us.

The heroic act of confidence will be rewarded, our life, limited to one field only, will acquire a new dimen-

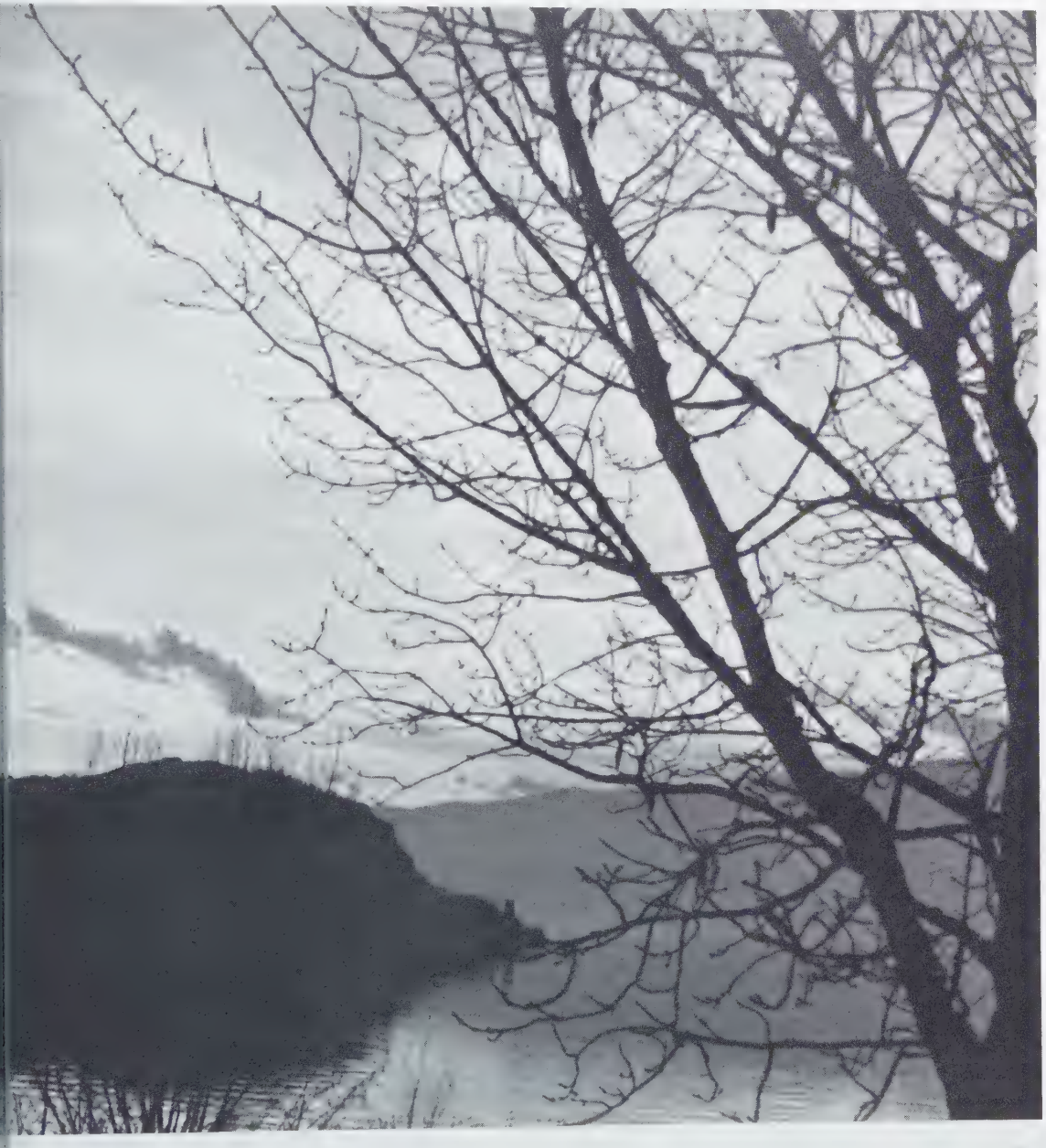

Photo by Roberto Colella

sion, we will feel in contact with the infinite for which we yearn; and faith, taking on a new vigor, will strengthen the love, the charity in us.

We will no longer remember what loneliness means. The reality that we are truly children of a God-Father who can do everything, will become clearer to us because we also have experienced it.

by CHIARA LUBICH

WORD OF LIFE

"I am . . . the life."

(Jn. 14,6)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"I am . . . the life."

During the week of prayer for Christian unity, which takes place this month, all followers of Christ are invited to direct their attention to a particular theme. This year it is: "Jesus Christ, life of the world."

In order for us to go deeper into this in our own lives, we chose as the word of life for January the solemn statement that Jesus made about himself:

"I am . . . the life."

Why is it that Jesus can say of himself: "I am the life?"

It is because he is different from us: our life comes from others while Jesus possesses life in himself. Christ, in fact, is God; he is eternally in the Father and the Father is in him.

His life is not like ours. Biologically we will grow old and die but his life escapes that inevitable destiny. It is always life; it is eternal life.

"I am . . . the life."

Since Jesus possesses life, is life, he can give it to us. He can give us that life which will not end even when the moment of our physical death arrives.

Human beings by their very nature aspire to something greater than themselves, since they are made in the image and likeness of God. This means that they are called to a relationship of communion with him. In the life that Jesus gives them they find fullness, the undreamed of fulfillment of their true selves, complete happiness.

"I am . . . the life."

The life that Jesus gives to the Christian is not just for the future, for the next world. It is a gift for the present as well. Because of it Christians already possess in themselves something which will not die.

Faith, which for a Christian means total commitment to Christ, makes us capable of receiving this life. Jesus, in fact, said: "Anyone who believes in the Son has eternal life" (Jn3:36).

The words of Christ bring us this life when we accept them and live them with love: "I tell you most solemnly, whoever listens to my words . . . has eternal life" (Jn.5:24).

Jesus also offers us this life in the Eucharist, the "bread of life;" and, when it is worthily received, it can satisfy every person's infinite hunger for life.

"I am . . . the life."

How can we live these extraordinary words of Christ?

The world today would like to convince itself that material well-being, the consumer way of life, a high level of education, science are enough to satisfy its needs. But this is not true. We know it, we experience it every day. So, first of all, we need to be sincere with ourselves and with others, admitting that it takes much more to fill our hearts.

Then we want to put this life into action: believe in Christ with all our hearts; choose him as our ideal, as our leader on our way through this life; make his words our own, living them one by one, with great love until they become our rule of life; and nourish ourselves with the life that he is offering us in the Eucharist. We will then experience for ourselves that this life is the only one which gives true meaning to our existence and answers our every question.

CHIARA LUBICH

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

A HAPPY ENDING

I guess it all began (one can never really be sure) when my oldest daughter started to have trouble in school — at least, this is when I became aware that something was seriously wrong. She had always been an above average student, and our rapport with each other in her younger years was great. She was such a loving child, generous, helpful with the younger children, obedient, thoughtful of me and others. For this reason I never quite realized how deeply sensitive she was. It was not until she began to grow older and her problems at school and home became more complex that I recognized them.

During her freshman year she had trouble with a certain teacher; this was compounded with the loss of her best friend, and the necessity for her changing schools twice in a period of two years. She also missed her grandmother who had lived with us for many years and now had moved out. The loss of her friend was due in part to our having forbidden her to stay at the girl's house. Although we allowed the girl to come to our house, they both resented our decision. My daughter also felt it was our fault that her grandmother had left our home.

I'm sure, however, that there was much more than this involved in contributing to my daughter's problems. By the third quarter of her freshman year, she was totally disgusted with parochial school and begged us to take her out and put her in the local public school. We asked her to wait until June at least, but she kept pleading and we agreed. She started truanting a lot and lost her freshman credits. That summer she found some new friends on our block and started staying out evenings. She came home later and later. When we used to go to the garage where they would all gather, she refused to come home with us. When we would forbid her to go out at all, she went anyway. If we gave her a physical punishment, she would scream so loud that the neighbors actually thought we were abusing her. She told all her friends we abused her. She had our younger children confused and upset. We had all kinds of advice from friends that we shouldn't hit a kid that age, we ought to try to reason with her, or take away her privileges, etc.; but nothing worked. One day a neighbor complained to the police that our daughter and some other girls were entering her home to visit her sons when she was at work. She had told the girls to stay away, but they went anyway. The police came with the lady and told us to keep our daughter away from that lady's house. When we explained that she would not listen to us, the police told us it was our responsibility and that we were to use any means necessary; otherwise, they would have to do it themselves. After the police left, the lady started crying hysterically about how hard it was to raise those boys all alone. My heart went out to her; I held her in my arms and we cried together.

Soon after this, they moved away and my daughter found new friends. She wouldn't tell us who they were or where they lived. Her night hours were getting later. School began again and she truanted constantly. The more we tried to talk to her, the more belligerent she became. She told us not to try to find her because her new friends would burn our house down and harm our other children. At this point we weren't sure if she was bluffing or not. We notified the police on nights she arrived past curfew, and she was put on probation.

My husband and I drew very close in those days, always trying to see in unity what to do. Each month gave us a new word of life; they were like beacons guiding us through the darkness of uncertainty.

Then she ran away. By the second night my fear was so great I couldn't function at all. I couldn't say a rosary or take care of my family — I was paralyzed with anxiety. Looking at the picture of Mary in my room, I told her, "But you, you are her mother too. You can see her when I can't. You can see her now." Immediately I entrusted her to Mary and all fear vanished. I was calm, I could think. I felt it was the will of God to go immediately to my family and start loving them. We all prayed together for her. I passed the following days trusting in Mary's protection. A week later she came home. There was a court hearing. She promised to listen to us and she was sent back to our home. Soon, however, it started all over again. She changed friends again, and I suspected that she was trying drugs. If we questioned her, she would scream at us and walk out. Her hours got later

It was not until my daughter began to grow older and her problems at school and home became more complex that I recognized them.

and later; sometimes she wouldn't come home until the next morning. We continued calling the police; she was given another court date. This time she used abusive language to her probation officer, and the judge put her away for a week. We went to visit her and she seemed to be much more receptive to us. Although she blamed us for her being there, she was glad to see us. She made some promises. When her time was up, the judge sent her home. Again she changed friends. Under their bad influence, things deteriorated rapidly. Sometimes she came home drunk. The word of life for that month ". . . Put your gifts at the service of one another, each in the measure he has received." The only gift we felt we could give her was our love, and now it meant to be more firm than we had ever been before. We had her arrested again — this time we were determined not to let the court talk us into taking her home. It was a disturbing decision because we could not be certain where the court would place her; some of the possibilities were frightening. We had talked to her probation officer who assured us that she would try everything to see that our girl was sent to a certain highly recommendable place run by nuns. The only problem was that the court rarely sent girls there because of the expense. We were counting on the probation officer to push it through.

Then came the actual court date. For the first time since we had been going to court, our probation officer was not sitting with us. That morning she had six other cases which took her all over the courthouse. She would check in every half hour or so as we waited to be called. My fear kept mounting that she'd miss our hearing. There was also a new judge — not the one who knew us. I was becoming agitated and irritable. Then I remembered it was the beginning of a new month and that there was a new word of life. I eagerly read it, looking for some direction. It was, "I am the vine and you are the branches; whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing." That last part — ". . . for without me you can do nothing," enabled me to see my error — here I had been worrying about the probation officer as if everything had depended on her.

Now I saw that what I needed was faith in Jesus. The thing to do was to start loving the people around me in that present moment. I turned to my husband, whom I had made edgy by my nervousness, and told him how I felt. He calmed down, too. Then we saw a mother with some cranky children; we started playing with them. At that point, our case was called, and the probation officer was nowhere in sight. But it didn't matter anymore because I was certain that God would help us. The judge looked over our records and recommended that our daughter be sent to the home of our choice!

Sundays were visiting days and we went to see her every week although we had record snowstorms that year. Sometimes we froze waiting for buses in the cold, but the word of life, ". . . Save your riches in heaven where they will never decrease, because no thief can get to them, no moth can destroy them," gave us the grace to offer up the hardships. About this time the birth of our sixth child was drawing near. I wanted our oldest daughter to be a part of this event, so I asked permission to bring the baby to the home where my daughter was, right from the hospital, (even if it wasn't a visiting day) so that she would be the first of my children to see the baby. Since she was the eldest and was living away from home, I hoped this would help her feel close to the baby.

The next word of life was: "He loved his own in the world, and would show his love for them to the end." The time came for the baby. After my long and very difficult labor a beautiful little girl was born to us!

We didn't get to bring the baby home right away. While she was still in the hospital, however, the eldest daughter came for her first home visit. We went to the hospital not knowing if she would be permitted to visit the newborn nursery, but we were determined to try. Not only they let us both in, but they got her a rocking chair and let her feed the baby. They told us to stay as long as we wanted, even though the visiting hours were for one hour. Our plan was scratched, but God's plan was better. It was a very touching moment, there in the hospital — the three of us together.

The next month we found out that my daughter's residential home would be closing down. The word of life was, "Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides." My natural inclination was to worry, asking myself, "What will happen to her now? Do we have to go through this all over again?" The word of life reminded me that to seek his kingship meant to love my brothers in the present moment, the new baby, my other children, my husband.

The following month the word of life was: "By patient endurance you will save your lives." The home closed down. My daughter went to a group home run by the most overpowering woman I had ever met. I wasn't sure it was going to work out at all. She had much more freedom there. Well,

the word of life again came to my rescue, reminding me to be patient and trust in God. It paid off! My daughter started school again, and by January she was on the honor roll. Then her probation was over, and she was free to come home. She decided to quit school again, but this time she was almost seventeen, and we felt it was useless to try to stop her.

She brought home a new boyfriend. He, too, had had the experience of living away from his family for quite awhile. A short time later they announced that they planned to live together and that they wanted to know if we would take police action against them. If we would, they planned to leave the state. We thought it over. She was nearly seventeen now, and we knew the only way we could stop her was to start with the courts all over again. We talked about it, trying to see what was the most love. Some of our other children were still suffering emotionally from the previous years, and we felt that this time we would entrust her entirely to God. We did. They lived in an apartment a few miles away. During this period we had lots of crazy little decisions to make. such as — if we visit them, they'll think we condone what they are doing, yet if we don't , they'll say we don't love them. We decided to visit sometimes, each time reminding them that we loved them, but did not approve of the way they were living; then we would drop the subject. This went on for almost eight months, and then one day they came to us to ask us to sign for her to be married. Another decision to be made — whatever we should sign, taking the risk of being wrong, or whether we should let them wait until she was of age, allowing them to live a life against the commandments. This time I

wasn't really sure. My husband was all for it, but in my heart I really suffered indecision. It would have been so easy if she had already been eighteen and could have made her own decision; yet God was asking us to be a part of it, and I felt he wasn't giving me any confirmation. We signed for the license. I entrusted the whole thing to God. They both spoke with a counselor and then the priest. Plans were underway for the wedding! We were broke, and they were out of work. I really wasn't sure how we would do it. I just entrusted the whole matter to God asking him for everything. She wanted to be married on Valentine's Day which gave us only a few weeks. As soon as our friends and relatives heard, they all started offering help. My girlfriend offered her wedding dress and veil. Another girlfriend of mine, a seamstress, offered to alter, wash and iron it. My sister made the cake and all the bouquets and flowers. Everyone prepared food. Two days before the wedding another friend called and told us we could use his union hall free of charge. We stayed up all night cleaning it and decorating it. The word of life was, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." The ceremony was beautiful. All through it I just kept thanking God for his love for us. At the reception there was a heartwarming reunion. My son-in-law's dad and his aunt who had parted fifteen years ago in an argument made peace that day, much to my son-in-law's joy.

Last month my daughter took the test for her high school equivalency. She received the results indicating that she had passed; now she has began a training program in the computer field. Her husband will be starting a training program too. There came to my mind the word of life that we were currently living: "What I want is mercy, not sacrifice." As does each word of life, it seemed to lead me back to Jesus, the One Who is always there and Who always know what to do, Who, in his merciful love, has the solution to every problem.

L.S.

Images FOR words

Photo by William I. Kaufman

"The Lord will
reign forever
and will give
his people
the gift of peace."

Psalm 28

FAMILY LIFE

The "forever" that one forgets

"A statement of a friend left me speechless," a girl wrote to our magazine a while ago. She quoted the sentence that baffled her: "To move to a third marriage may provide an individual that fullness of human experience that was not previously possible." Her question then followed: "First let me say that I am not married and I do not have any experience in this matter, but what will be the human and the Christian response to my friend's statement?"

While pondering that probably there is not a first "human" answer separated from a second "Christian" answer, as a cork floating on water, a memory surfaced in my mind — in a big village near Milan, in a building that had probably been a farm — the parents of a friend were celebrating their golden anniversary.

In seeing this couple calmly smiling in the midst of their children, grandchildren and friends, I felt moved in spite of myself. To overcome this feeling, but also out of authentic curiosity, I asked the wife, during a brief visit with her, what she had conserved from all the years, from all the different experiences lived together with the same person. She looked up at me with a curious look on her face, a mixture of surprise, but also a certain pride. After all, it was clear that she was making allowance for my tactless question. She answered in a way that I would never have expected from her. "It seems to me," she said, "that marriage is really a serious thing, it deserves to be lived out until the end, no matter what the price." And then her voice stressed this point, "We really grow together in spite of . . . or, even better, especially because we go through all these difficulties."

There was not the least bit of pretentiousness or preaching in what she said, just the clear objectivity of her experience. I left her shortly afterwards, feeling myself a little confused, but also deeply touched.

Later on, after my own marriage, I don't know why but I would often remember her words, especially in those most difficult moments when our paths became very, very narrow. The contact with many couples, well or badly matched, faithful or not, "happy" or "unhappy," perservering or despairing, the contact with couples divided and discouraged by unresolved incomprehension and resentments, made me appreciate even more the wisdom and the truthfulness of her answer.

I recall a special case. I knew him before his marriage. A nice young man, sociable and athletic. He made a "marriage of love" with a lovely girl, sensible and charming. Two children were born one after the other. His free-and-easy manner, though, was only masking a certain kind of superficiality, childishness and immaturity. After the first period of enthusiasm and euphoria came the hour of truth, of bitter disillusionment for the wife. She thought that she had married a man but she found herself living with a carefree, insipid child. For a while she was able to put up a good front in an unpleasant situation, but when a very interesting person, profound and with an interior richness, crossed her path, she fell head over heels in love. She was ready to leave her home. husband and children, to shame her parents and in laws . . . It was at that time, when they both painfully confided in my husband and me, that we witnessed something really extraordinary.

From his surprise, shock and acute suffering, something beautiful unexpectedly sprang up: it was not rebelliousness or self-pity, it a new love made of patience and tenderness, enduring fidelity, manliness and sincere understanding, a new curiosity and true interest in the life and needs of his wife. He wanted to understand the "reason" for what had happened, and this brought to him a new self-awareness. The easy-going and carefree big boy, found in himself a new and mature personality that he never possessed before, and, as a consequence, a new capability to win back his spouse.

"The desire to know and discover each other's needs has to be cultivated with patience and perseverance."

"Literally, love can be reborn from its ashes," she commented to me a while ago. "What did I learn out of all this? Do you remember what you were saying in that article on instinct, sentiment and motherly love? Well, it seems that it is also true for conjugal love. To fall in love is beautiful: you need physical attraction and also a bit of passion, but, after all, to seriously love each other we must 'want' to love."

"When Giorgio and I fell in love, like everybody else, we said to each other that it would be "forever." But then, after a while, as you can see very well, one forgets about this "forever," and what comes to the fore are the mistakes and faults that you were not aware of, or that you thought you could correct. In this process your love gets tired. If only you knew the tunnel of sadness that I had to go through! But now Giorgio is really a new person. Or, could it be that just now I am starting to know him? And I have to admit that I am a different person, too. Or, could it be that I am starting only now to understand who I am?"

Lately I met several people who were asking themselves the same question, "Would it not be better, when love is gone and does not give anything anymore, when a rapport is finished and it is no longer satisfying, to close the experience altogether and move on to a different situation?" I saw many, young and old alike, men and women disillusioned and dissatisfied with a particular relationship, fall in love with a new person and start a new experience, passionate and full of hopes, feeling enriched and matured in this new relationship.

On the other hand I was always struck by the human thirst for the new, for a constant freshness, by the desire for "something more" and "better" that the individual is constantly looking for in all his encounters, continually striving toward fulfillment. It is something that I feel in myself, too. And I like it. It is something extremely positive. It keeps us from a passive resignation and stagnation in the superficial, limited and finite.

But at this point I have a question. What is more formative for a person: to go through many and different experiences, moving on to a new one, every time that one seems to wither and is no longer satisfying, or to attempt, with constant effort, through failures and losses, to bring to full maturity only one, in which, little by little, with surprise and joy, we may be able, eventually, to perceive a new and immense dimension?

For me, every human being is a world full of infinite resources that should never cease to arouse our interest. And for this reason, I think that a relationship can never be called finished, over. Of course there are serious cases of sickness, anomalies, incompatibilities, but these should represent the exception rather than the norm. The fact is that the desire to know another person, to discover each other always more fully, to experience each other better and more deeply, becomes

The joyful moment of the wedding. The road which begins here has its ups and downs for every couple. But difficulties can become the most important moments for building an experience of love that is always richer and deeper.

The freshness of a relationship which is always new reveals a world of intimate understanding, sharing and mutual discovery.

exhausted even before love does (maybe because in our consumer mentality we tend to 'dispose' of people as easily as we do with 'things'?). Instead, the desire to know and discover each other's needs has to be cultivated and educated with patience and perseverance.

A second question came to my mind. The inner spring I was talking about before, that spurs in us the desire to go "always a little farther" toward the new and the unknown, may be the sign that we all, married or not, are destined to live in relation with an infinite "Thou" that will never tire, disappoint or forsake us. Would then our insatiability reveal a deeper "nostalgia"?

Let me now turn to another page, and put together some short passages of a long letter that an elderly lady wrote to us some time ago: "I am no longer young — 68 years," she started as a way of introduction, "although young in spirit and open-minded to all the innovations of our time ... I have a 'golden' husband, very good-hearted, dedicated to all and everything — home, job, children, Church, political party, his family, my family... What more could I possibly ask for? Yet, I would probably have settled for one that was only a 'silvery' husband, with a little more time. Because between his activities and mine, there had always been very little time left 'for the two of us.' For him it was fine like that, but for me, I would have loved something different, something more... between the two of us and 'just for us'. How can it be possible that the time a husband and wife spend together, even when they are saying nothing, might be considered a waste of time?"

In rereading these passages, I was reflecting on the fact that a conjugal fidelity in itself, maintained only out of habit, education or moralistic conditioning, certainly does not have any great content. We can be faithful, constant in a relationship, but without dynamism or vitality.

In that case, this union, even though apparently smooth and

without traumas, in reality is a sterile one. The two people making up the couple will pine away and progressively fade out, in a word, they will "grow old" not only physically but also in their relationship, a relationship now devoid of imagination and creativity.

A few days ago I visited two very old friends, old in their age, and in our friendship. For several months he had been confined to bed as a consequence of a heart attack. She, in spite of her age, is still very lucid and able to move around freely, continuing to care for and follow him in this last period of his earthly adventure. When I was there, a priest came to bring the Eucharist to him. After her husband had received the Host, I noticed one of her gestures. Tenderly and silently she offered him a glass of water to help him to swallow. The "way" she did it told me many things, revealing a whole world of intimate understanding, sharing and goals reached together in reciprocal discovery through many encounters and surprises.

I have known this couple for a long time. They had no children and suffered a lot for this. But docile, always ready and generous, they reared their nephews and nieces, they gave hospitality to many youngsters for long periods of time, being a "home" for many of them. In all the years of their marriage, though, I believe their "dialogue" never stopped (I could see that from her gesture). They continued to explore each other's worlds, avoiding the everyday temptation to close themselves in the trap of "I am this way" — "You are that way," to be free, instead, to look out together on the renewed newness of the day.

compiled by Mariele Quartana

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What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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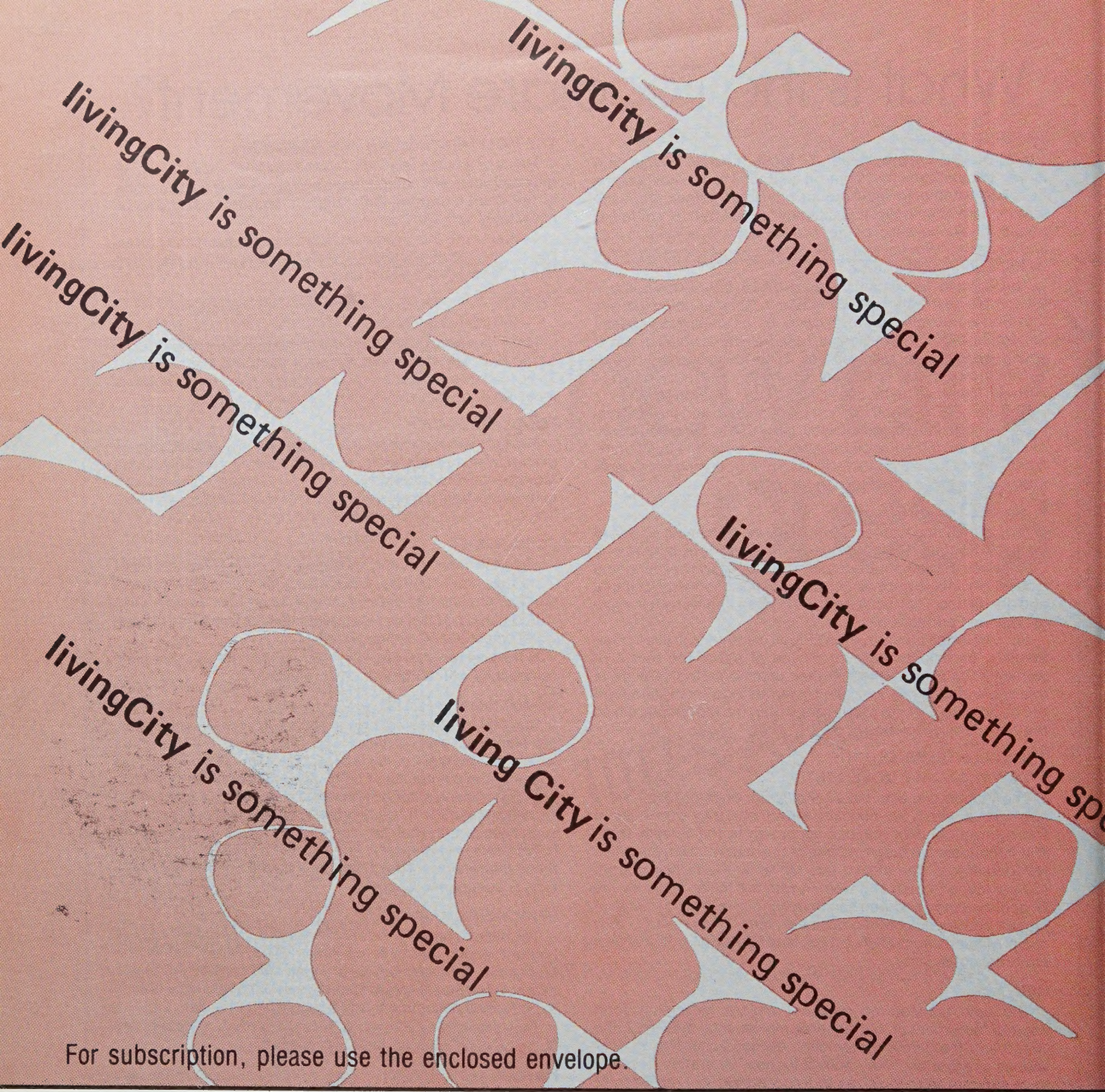
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